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Adeline Hoffelinck (Ghent University), New light on the commercial landscape of Roman cities: towards an archaeological research agenda

When studying the urban economy of the Roman world and in particular the Italian peninsula one always refers to the well-known sites of Pompeii, Ostia and Herculaneum, where the extensive material remains of shops and workshops provide us with a glimpse of their bustling economic life. While the study of these cities was and still remains essential in investigating the Roman economy and urbanization, many other sites have been neglected and need to be brought into current debates. This mainly concerns cities whose remains are currently not visible to the modern eye because they simply were not preserved in an extraordinary way and have not been the subject of long term excavations. That these lost towns can be mapped and visually reconstructed by means of non-invasive full coverage surveys has been proven during many recent projects in the Roman Mediterranean world. Within my talk I would like to propose an agenda for future research in which the integration of non-destructive methods for the study of urban commercial space gets the upper hand. These methods have the potential to bring many other Roman sites into the debate, making way for a comparative approach of cities over broader geographical areas than central Tyrrhenian Italy. By empowering the methodological approach and expanding the geographical focus substantial information can be gained on the relationship between the economic environment and a wide range of urbanization processes.